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# PATRIOTS IN DISGUISE

Women Warriors  
of the Civil War

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Infantry until the end of the war. According to the memoirs of Fannie Beers, "[Rose] served with the undaunted bravery which led her to risk the dangers of every battle-field where the regiment was engaged, unheeding the zip of the minies [bullets], the shock of shells, or the horrible havoc made by the solid shot, so that she might give timely succor to the wounded or comfort the dying." At the end of the war Rose was taken prisoner for a while because of her defiance of Federal authorities. Later, she made her way back to New Orleans, where she served as matron of Camp Nichols Soldiers' Home.

The contributions of Irish and German immigrants to Civil War regiments is well known. Another "minority" of the time (in addition to women and Native Americans, who served on both sides) were Russians. Ivan Vasilovitch Turchinoff was born on January 30, 1822 in the province of Don. He graduated in 1841 from the Imperial Military School in St. Petersburg, served as an ensign in the Czar's horse artillery, and as a colonel of the Imperial Guard. As a captain on the Russian general staff, he fought in Hungary and the Crimea.

Ivan came to America in 1856 along with his wife, the daughter of a Russian officer. They settled in Chicago, where he was employed by the Illinois Central Railroad. When the war broke out, Turchin (now spelling his name without the Russian ending) was commissioned colonel of the 19th Illinois Infantry Regiment in June, 1861. The following spring the regiment marched into Tennessee, with Mrs. Turchin along as an informal nurse and "mother" to the troops.

When Colonel Turchin was taken seriously ill and had to be carried in an ambulance, she assumed command of the regiment and apparently it did not miss a beat. An early postwar book reported, "her commands were obeyed with the utmost promptness. In the battles that followed, she was constantly under fire, now encouraging the men, and anon rescuing some wounded man from the place where he had fallen." After Colonel Turchin returned to command, she continued to serve as a battlefield nurse "always manifesting the most perfect indifference to the shot and shell or the whizzing minie balls that fell around her. She seemed entirely devoid of fear, and though so constantly exposed to the enemy's fire never received even a scratch."

Colonel Turchin's notions of total war later got him in trouble. When he encouraged his soldiers to loot and pillage Athens, Ala-

bama, his commander was enraged. For this offense, and for having his wife with him in the field contrary to orders, he was court-martialed and dismissal was recommended. However, Mrs. Turchin went to Washington and personally lobbied President Lincoln on his behalf. She persuaded Lincoln to set aside the verdict. In addition, the President commissioned Turchin as a brigadier general.

Turchin subsequently performed valiant and meritorious service as a brigade commander at Chickamauga (where he earned the nickname of "Russian Thunderbolt"), at Missionary Ridge, and during the Atlanta campaign. Late in 1864, ill health compelled him to resign.

Little information survives about other *vivandieres* or women in camp. "Dutch Mary" makes a brief appearance in the wartime journal of John Haley, a soldier in the 17th Maine Infantry Regiment. In camp near Fredericksburg, Virginia, in December, 1862, Haley notes that the "frau" of a Zouave is with them, "a woman whose adipose tissue is quite remarkable, as is her agility. . . . She cooks and washes for the officers, thereby earning an honest penny."

Haley writes with wit and insight, showing a grudging respect for "Dutch Mary" despite some unflattering ethnic remarks.

When a battle rages, she is on hand to minister to the needs of the wounded. When in camp, she sometimes drills with the men, as today, and she can go through it as well as any. The way her legs fly when executing a wheeling operation reminds me of some swift-moving insect. . . . With her tight Zouave suit on, she looks like a man. One private, thinking to have a little sport at her expense, once came up behind her as she was washing some clothes at the brook, and kissed her. She seized a wet shirt and belabored him right and left, pursuing him out of camp, to the great amusement of his comrades and chagrin of himself. When next he felt in a jocose frame of mind, no doubt he didn't take Dutch Mary as the object of his mirth.

Bell Wiley reports a "laundress" (*vivandiere*?) attached to the Irish Brigade who advanced with the soldiers at Antietam, and "swung her bonnet around and cheered on the men." At this stage the Irish Brigade consisted mainly of New York infantry regiments of Catholic Irish (the 63rd, 69th, and 88th regiments). The 39th New York Infantry Regiment ("Garibaldi Guard") reportedly had at least six *vivandieres* who wore colorful costumes, though more than likely not on the battlefield; and Lizzie Jones served with the



smoking a cob-pipe. She was brought to me, and put in duress under charge of the division surgeon until her companion could be secured.

She told the surgeon that she had fled from east Tennessee the previous year, and having adopted male apparel was employed as a teamster in the quartermaster's department. Since she had "coarse and masculine" features, Sheridan was not surprised that she had been able to pass herself off as a man. He was somewhat more perplexed by the "she dragoon" (as he termed the female cavalry soldier) who was caught and brought before him next day.

The cavalry soldier

proved to be a rather prepossessing young woman, and though necessarily bronzed and hardened by exposure, I doubt if, even with these marks of campaigning, she could have deceived as readily as did her companion. How the two got acquainted I never learned, and though they had joined the army independently of each other, yet an intimacy had sprung up between them long before the mishaps of the foraging expedition. Both were "provided with clothing suited to their sex" and deported beyond army lines.

### *Female Mannerisms*

Despite passing for men in day-to-day soldiering, some young women were detected by their "female mannerisms" and sent home. At the outbreak of the war, there lived in Lake Mills, Wisconsin, a devoted brother and sister team, Mason and Sarah Collins; when Mason made up his mind to enlist his sister decided to do the same. She was physically strong and could easily have borne the hardships of army life. Her brother Mason, won over by her persistence, was a party to the deception. Her hair was cut short and she put on men's clothing.

When the time came to report to camp, she accompanied her brother to the rendezvous of the company, and though she had the appearance of masculinity, her sex was discovered "by her unmasculine manner of putting on her shoes and stockings." So with tears in her eyes, disappointed at her failure to become a soldier, she was obliged to return home, while her brother left for duty without her.

Early in the war the 1st Kentucky Infantry was serving in the Kanawha Valley Campaign in western Virginia. In late July, 1861, a young soldier who had served for three months was discovered to be a woman after arousing suspicion by her manner of pulling

on her stockings. In a book about his wartime experiences, newspaper correspondent Albert D. Richardson wrote: "She performed camp duties with great fortitude, and never fell out of the ranks during the severest marches. She was small in stature, and kept her coat buttoned to her chin." Most members of the regiment were from Ohio, where it was originally formed. When the surgeon established that she was a woman of about twenty, she was discharged from the regiment, but sent to Columbus, Ohio, on suspicion of being a spy because of some unspecified remarks she had made. Richardson did not learn what finally became of her.

Mary Smith enlisted in the 41st Ohio "McClellan Zouaves" in male disguise, to avenge the death of her only brother at Bull Run. Unfortunately for her, she was discovered to be a woman at Camp Wood, Cleveland, when she gave an "unmistakable twist to the dishcloth in wringing it out that no masculine [sic] could ever successfully counterfeit."

Mary Livermore, the famous nurse, was visiting the camp of the 19th Illinois one day when a captain asked her whether she noticed anything peculiar about one of the solidiers, whom he pointed out. "It was evident at a glance that the 'man' was a young woman in male attire," she reported, "and I said so." The captain replied, "That is the rumor, and that is my suspicion."

Charles W. Ives, 1st Sergeant of the 95th Illinois, while talking about "Albert Cashier," said that he knew of two other would-be female soldiers dressed in military uniforms who were detected when an officer threw apples to them, and they reached for their (nonexistent) aprons to catch the apples in. (See the notes for Chapter 2 under Rodney G. Davis.)

But the ultimate giveaway was reported in the Maysville, Kentucky, *Dollar Weekly Bulletin*, November 27, 1862: "The sex of a female recruit in Rochester was discovered by her trying to put her pants on over her head."

### *Female Casualties Discovered*

Bell I. Wiley, in his classic book on common soldiers of the Union, *Life of Billy Yank*, reported in a brief summary of female soldiers: "Some of the Union amazons were casualties; at least one was fatally wounded, while another was killed outright." The parallel section about women in the companion volume, *Life of Johnny*



during siege of Richmond. Husband wounded three times and eventually killed. She lived to be 112 years old.

TUBMAN, Harriet. Pre-Civil War "Moses" in "Underground Railway." June 1862-1865 commanded scouts and river pilots for Union forces in South Carolina, including spying missions. In June, 1862, led 150 Black troops in a raid. Later participated in other raids, carrying a musket.

TURCHIN, Mrs. General John B. 19th Illinois Infantry. Went to war with husband. On march into Tennessee in the spring of 1862 (then) Colonel Turchin was taken seriously ill and was carried in ambulance. She assumed command of the regiment. Later served as battlefield nurse, frequently under fire.

VELAZQUEZ, Loretta Janeta (w). ("Harry T. Buford"). Served as independent officer in Confederate army, and as "detective" and spy in secret service.

WILSON, Eliza. Served as daughter of the regiment in 5th Wisconsin Infantry.

WILSON, Fannie (or Fanny). Served eighteen months in 24th New Jersey Infantry Regiment before sex discovered during Vicksburg campaign. At Cairo, Illinois, danced in local ballet, reenlisted in 3rd Illinois Cavalry.

WISE, Mary E. (w). Served for two or more years in the 34th Indiana Infantry Regiment. Wounded in action three times before having to quit military service.

WRIGHT, Mary. Arrested in Confederate uniform and imprisoned at Nashville with another female soldier, Margaret Henry, near the end of the war.

### *Alphabetical Index by States*

#### *Arkansas*

Loretta Janeta Velazquez claimed to have raised a regiment or battalion called the Arkansas Grays that traveled to Pensacola, Florida, for training. Fought in several battles.

#### *Georgia*

Female militia as "home guard" during Sherman's "march through Georgia," training with weapons, wearing uniforms, and having a confrontation with a Wisconsin cavalry regiment late in the war.

#### *Illinois*

Harriet Brown enlisted as "Harry" in Illinois regiment, served in Kentucky. Not discovered for three months. Arrested in uniform while en route from Lexington, Kentucky, to Chicago. Pressed into hospital service as nurse.

At Battle of Lookout Mountain, Tennessee, November 24, 1863, an Illinois woman was one of eighteen scouts sent out to reconnoiter General Braxton Bragg's position; served as attaché in General Francis P. Blair, Jr.'s, XVII Corps during operations into Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

3rd Illinois Cavalry. Fannie Wilson disguised as male, discovered and discharged for second time, having been caught in another regiment after eighteen months service.

7th Illinois Cavalry. Sarah A. Clapp.

17th Illinois Infantry. Mrs. Belle Reynolds served with her lieutenant husband, saw combat, given a major's commission by governor.

19th Illinois Infantry. Female soldier discovered by her mannerisms.

19th Illinois Infantry. Madame John B. Turchin once took over command of regiment when her husband became seriously ill, constantly under fire as battlefield nurse.

63rd Illinois Infantry. Female soldier discovered with the regiment on board the steamer *Leni Leoti* at Smithland en route for Nashville.

66th Illinois Home Guards. Frances Hook served as "Frank Miller."

90th Illinois Infantry. Frances Hook.

95th Illinois Infantry. Jennie Hodgers ("Albert Cashier") served full three-year term without being discovered.

116th Illinois Infantry. "Kate" discovered dressed as a man serving on picket duty.

139th Illinois. Ellen P. L. Thompson served as female soldier.

#### *Indiana*

A woman was arrested in Indianapolis wearing a soldier's uniform. She was jailed until evening, then sent home to Winchester, Indiana.

Cavalry soldier wounded twice, fainted. When given a bath was found to be a woman, after twenty-one months of service.

Mary E. Wise served two or more years in the 34th Indiana Infantry regiment. Female soldier discovered serving in Captain Gerard's company of the 66th Indiana Infantry regiment.

#### *Iowa*

"Charles H. Williams" (female name unknown) served in the 2nd Iowa Infantry with her lieutenant boyfriend.

"Charles Hatfield" served in Iowa cavalry as an orderly for General Samuel R. Curtis's adjutant, and as spy behind enemy lines.

Mrs. Jerusha Small served as battlefield nurse with 12th Iowa Infantry.

A female soldier serving in the 14th Iowa Infantry shot herself after her sex was discovered in April, 1863.

#### *Kansas*

"Otto Schaffer," a farmer from Butler County who had served in the Civil War, found to be a woman upon death.

#### *Kentucky*

Female private in 1st Kentucky Infantry discovered to be a woman by her method of pulling on her stockings.

#### *Louisiana*

Loretta Janeta Velazquez served in 21st Louisiana Infantry.

#### *Maine*

"Dutch Mary" served with husband in 17th Maine Infantry, drilling with men and caring for wounded.